

Health and Health Equity in Climate Adaptation

Materials Include:

- [Health and Health Equity in Climate Adaptation Primer](#)
- [Incorporating Health and Health Equity into Climate Adaptation: A Guide for Simcoe Muskoka](#)

Climate change is a present and pressing reality with profound impacts on public health and community well-being in Simcoe Muskoka. Climate hazards, including extreme heat and weather events, poor air quality, food and water safety and security, vector-borne disease, and ultraviolet radiation, affect both physical and mental health. These impacts are magnified by interactions with the built, natural, and social environments, shaping how individuals and communities experience health and well-being.

The **Health and Health Equity in Climate Adaptation Primer** emphasizes that climate change is harming the health and well-being of our communities and calls for the integration of health and health equity considerations into local climate adaptation efforts across sectors. It highlights how climate hazards disproportionately affect people already facing social and health inequities, recognizing that systemic barriers can often lead to greater exposure, heightened sensitivity, and challenges to adaptive capacity. Without intentional efforts to address these disparities, climate adaptation strategies risk reinforcing or exacerbating existing health inequities and vulnerability to climate change.

To address this, the primer introduces key concepts:

- **Climate resilience** – the capacity of communities to anticipate, cope with, and recover from climate related shocks while maintaining essential functions.
- **Climate vulnerability** – shaped by exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity, all influenced by social determinants of health such as income, education, and housing. Vulnerability is not fixed but socially constructed and therefore modifiable through policy, planning, and action.

By applying a health and equity lens, local climate adaptation can shift from reactive measures to proactive, transformative strategies that address the root causes of vulnerability while improving population health.

The primer also outlines the public health continuum to climate adaptation, spanning:

- Upstream – policy and systemic change,
- Midstream – community-level interventions, and
- Downstream – individual-level responses.

This balanced approach combines immediate responses to health impacts with long-term structural action to reduce disparities and risks. The primer further calls for a life-course perspective, recognizing cumulative and age-specific impacts, and emphasizes the importance of inclusive governance: engaging groups historically excluded from decision-making and centering Indigenous knowledge and leadership in adaptation planning.

Ultimately, building climate resilience requires cross-sectoral collaboration, inclusive planning, and a commitment to equity. The second resource, *Incorporating Health and Health Equity into Climate Adaptation: A Guide for Simcoe Muskoka*, provides practical tools, general and topic-specific guidance across areas such as urban planning, housing, transportation, energy, water resources, natural environments, recreation, and food security. Together, these materials aim to support coordinated, equity-focused climate action that fosters healthier, more resilient, and thriving communities in Simcoe Muskoka.

These resources were developed through the collaborative efforts of the Ontario Resource Centre for Climate Adaptation. and Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

